Shags are medium to large aquatic birds. Most are all black or black above and white below. Bill long, strongly hooked at the tip. Uplight posture when perched. Short legs, but are fully webbed. Many have brightly coloured facial skin when breeding. Texas slika. In flight, wings short and broad, and neck is extended. Swim with head held upright and body low in the water.

STEWART ISLAND SHAG

Leucocarbo chalconotus

Locally endemic

66 cm, 2.5 kg. Large jet-black shag with pied and bronze phases and some intermediates. Pied phase is like King Shag, but caruncles orange and facial skin purplish; juvenile to brownish white and white below, and usually lacks white patches on wings and back. Adult Bronze phase is all brownish Black with green and blue gloss to facial skin and can be confused with a light phase of the King Shag. Adult female shows white stripes on breast. Breeding birds develop long dark orange and chestnut bill and red legs. Found in southwestern South Island. Stewart Strait. Breeding: Aug–Mar.

(Sp 96)

SHAGS

33 species worldwide in freshwater and marine habitats; 33 species in the New Zealand region, including 8 endemic species.

In New Zealand, all members of the Phalacrocoracidae are called shags, whereas elsewhere the term ‘common’ is used for members of the genus Phalacrocorax. Foot colour varies between the three genera in New Zealand: black in the mainly freshwater Phalacrocorax, pink in the marine Leucocarbo, and yellow in the wattle Leucocarbo. Shags are medium to large, long-necked aquatic birds with a stiff, wedge-shaped bill, and moderately short, mandranged wings, which black-tailed shags hold out to dry when perched. They feed by diving from the water surface to catch fish and crustaceans with a long hooked bill. They use their webbed feet to swim underwater. The outermost toe is longest, and a web connects the inner toe with the long hind toe. In the breeding season, bare skin on the face becomes brightly coloured and contrasts with the eye and bill. Shags sometimes feed in flocks, but they typically flock in roosts and in flocks on cliffs or rock ledges, or in non-breeding water, sometimes together with other shags. They have an elaborate series of ritualized chick-rearing displays at or near the nest, a bulky platform made of sticks or seaweed. Their eggs have a chalky encrustation on the surface. Both sexes share incubation. The chicks are tucked in hiding but soon develop down. Both parents regurgitate food for the chicks. If a predator approaches, chicks in trees or overhanging water will jump well before they can fly, but they are adept at climbing back up to the nest.

96. STEWART ISLAND SHAG

Other name: Bronze Shag (dark phase).
Size: 68 cm, 2.5 kg.
Geographical variation: The two main colour phases, bronze and pied, are interbreed freely. Birds breeding in Otago are much larger and have more developed plumage above the bill than those in Fiordland.

Medium to large, black-brown bird with large bill and wings. The bill is orange at the base and brownish-black distally. The legs are orange-brown. The skin on the head and neck is brown. The plumage is black-brown, with a white patch on the wing. The tail is short and rounded. The legs are long and webbed. The birds are able to swim well and often take to the water when they are disturbed. The diet consists of fish, crustaceans, and other aquatic animals. The birds are found in coastal areas, particularly in the southern part of the country. They are known to be aggressive and will attack predators if they are threatened. The birds are breeding birds, and the nest is usually a bulky platform made of sticks and seaweed. The eggs are white, and the chicks are white with black spots. The chicks are able to fly after 36 days, and they are able to fly after 36 days, and they are able to fly after 36 days.

Phalacrocoracidae

Leucocarbo chalconotus

Plate 24

have more developed plumage above the bill than those in Fiordland. The bronze phase predominates in the north, while the pied phase predominates in the south. A few birds have intermediate plumage.

A level platform about 0.3 m in diameter made of sticks and seaweed and cemented with guano. The breeding season is long and variable, but lasting mostly in September–November. They lay 1–3 eggs. The eggs are grey to green. There is no information on incubation or fledging periods.

Behaviour: Sometimes seen on headlands and islands in huge flocks of 100s of birds, particularly in April–May. They are silent away from their colonies, and the only calls at the nest are faint. Feeding: Diet in Otago is mainly bullies and seafooderding fish such as codfish and snapper. Marine invertebrates such as crabs, shrimps, octopuses and polychaete worms are occasionally eaten. Food is taken in water less than 30 m deep, but they feed up to 15 km from land. Average dive times are 50–70 seconds, but the maximum recorded is close to 3 minutes. Rests between dives last 20–40 seconds.